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# THE CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

Ἰὼρ το Θία ἀν ῥνα ἡάρουῖ, ἀγῡρ ρίοῶάν ἀν ἀν ὁαλαῖν ὁαῖτοῖν ὁο να ὁόοιῖν.

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## NOVELTY OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE OF EXTREME UNCTION.

AMONG the many arguments on which the Church of Rome relies, and which she makes use of, both to confirm the attachment of her own members, and to attract converts within her pale, we believe that there is scarcely any one more effectual for her purpose than the claim of *exclusive antiquity*. It is continually asserted by her controversial writers, that the doctrines and discipline of the Church of Rome are as ancient as the first preachers of the Gospel, and have been handed down, pure and unchanged, from their times; and Protestants are repeatedly taunted with the *novelty* of their creed, and accused of departing from the rites and practices of the primitive Church. In our own country especially, the influence of this argument or assertion can scarcely be exaggerated. No one who is familiar with the language and ideas of the Irish peasantry, can fail to be impressed with their deep reverence for antiquity, and the value which they consequently attach to every object, sacred or secular, which has been, as it were, consecrated by time. Nothing is more common than to hear the humbler classes of Roman Catholics speak of the "*old Church*" as being alone possessed of the true faith: and they feel a kind of proud satisfaction in clinging to a creed which, as they conceive, has preserved its purity unswerving through the lapse of ages, and has been transmitted to them, unaltered and uncorrupted, from the times of the Apostles themselves.

Now, we freely admit the truth and soundness of the principle which lies at the bottom of these feelings and convictions. It is this—that Christianity is a Divine revelation, proceeding from God as its first author, and proclaimed to mankind by his messengers; and that, therefore, the nearer we can ascend to the source, the more likely we are to find the doctrine of Christianity in a state of purity. But if this be so, it obviously follows that *all* Christians, whether they be Roman Catholics or Protestants, ought to be anxious to learn how far the faith which they profess be *indeed* the primitive faith which was taught by Christ and his Apostles. We are as zealous upholders of antiquity, when rightly understood, as the most devout member of the Church of Rome; and this very point is one of the chief grounds of our controversy with her. We assert that she has *not* handed down the pure Catholic faith, but that she has overlaid it, from time to time, with more or less modern corruptions of her own invention. We assert that she can produce no adequate warrant from Scripture, no support from primitive antiquity, for many of her most important rites and doctrines. If we can establish these assertions to the satisfaction of our readers, we may safely leave it to their discernment to decide whether she really possesses that "*venerable antiquity*" to which she lays such exclusive claim; or, rather, whether she is not justly liable to the heavy censure denounced by St. Paul against those who "*depart from the faith*."—1 Tim. iv. 1.

In illustration of the truth of the foregoing remarks, we propose, at present, briefly to examine the doctrine of extreme unction. This is one of the rites of the Roman Catholic Church which, from its connection

with the solemn season of death, and from the influence which it is believed to exercise on the state of the departing spirit, is a subject of deep interest to all her members. To be deprived of "the rites of the church" is looked upon by them as the greatest misfortune which can befall a dying person; and hence the threat of withholding these rites is, as recent events have proved, one of the most efficacious weapons which can be used by the ministers of the Roman Catholic Church, when they wish to coerce the conduct of any individuals among their flocks. When any person is at the point of death, his friends and relations spare no pains to secure the presence of the priest, in order that he may administer extreme unction to the dying man; and when once this task has been accomplished, their minds are happy, and the sick man departs in peace.

But, perhaps, the inquiry may arise in some minds, what is the origin of extreme unction? Is it commanded in Scripture? Did this custom always exist in the church? Does this rite bestow any real benefit upon him who receives it? These are points on which every sincere Roman Catholic ought to be anxious for information, but on which, nevertheless, his religious instructors are not always either willing, or, perhaps, able to clear up any doubts that may arise. And yet, considering the very great importance which Roman Catholic priests attach to this sacrament of their church; considering, moreover, that their possession of an infallible head ought to be a never-failing remedy for any doubts and difficulties that may arise; taking these things into account, one would naturally expect to find clear and consistent replies to all the foregoing questions in the works of the eminent divines of the Church of Rome. But, alas! when we come to consult them, we find nothing but contradictions and inconsistencies, as we shall now proceed to prove.

And first, as regards the institution of this supposed sacrament:—Roman Catholics and Protestants are both agreed that every true sacrament of the Christian Church must have been instituted and appointed by Christ himself—nay, the Council of Trent has denounced an anathema against any person who presumes to believe otherwise.\* Hence, if extreme unction be really a sacrament, some mention of its institution by Christ ought to be found in the Gospels. But we may search in vain for any such command; and this fact is admitted by most Roman Catholic writers. In one of the popular catechisms of that church we find the following passage:—

"Q. What is the fifth sacrament? A. Extreme unction. Q. When did Christ institute it? *The time is uncertain*; some think it was instituted at his last supper: others, that it was done between his resurrection and ascension."

This is also the statement of Dens, who writes as follows:—

"Q. Was this sacrament immediately instituted by Christ? A. St. Thomas answers in the affirmative. This is collected from the Council of Trent, which teaches that it was promulgated by S. James; therefore he judges that it was not instituted by him, but immediately by Christ. Q. When did Christ institute it? A. The time is uncertain; yet it is very likely that he instituted it after his resurrection." Bellarmine simply states (without assigning any authority) that the institution is to be *inferred* from the passage in S. James v. 14. Now, let our readers consider the full extent of these admissions. If any question is raised about baptism or the Lord's Supper, we can point to the very passage in the Gospel histories which records the institution of each of these sacraments, and we can quote the very words of our Blessed Lord, enjoining the perpetual use of them in his Church. But with regard to extreme unction, no such command exists. The time of institution, we are told, is *uncertain*. Some writers fix on one period of our Lord's history, and some another; but all their guesses are alike destitute of a shadow of foundation from Scripture. Is not this fact

of itself sufficient to make any thoughtful person *doubt* whether extreme unction be really a sacrament at all?

In the declaration of the Council of Trent respecting extreme unction, there is one word, the history of which is too curious to be omitted, inasmuch as it proves the uncertainty and vagueness which existed in the minds of the learned doctors who composed the council, regarding the origin of this supposed sacrament. The decree of the Council of Trent states, that extreme unction was "*instituted*" by Christ, *insinuated* in St. Mark, and promulgated by St. James."

The passage in St. Mark's Gospel here referred to is as follows (chapter vi. 13):—"And they (*i.e.*, the Apostles) cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." Now, we are informed by the historian of the Council of Trent,† that the assembled divines at first boldly stated in their decree, that the sacrament of extreme unction was *instituted* in this passage of St. Mark; but a divine who was present remarked, that this rite could not have been then performed by the Apostles, because they were not made priests until the last Supper; and were, therefore, incapable of administering extreme unction when they were first sent forth by our Lord. This meddling theologian disconcerted the sacred synod. The holy Fathers, embarrassed by the inconsistency, began to look about for some way of ridding themselves of this contradiction. Extreme unction, said this infallible assembly, was not instituted, but merely *insinuated* in St. Mark, and afterwards published in St. James. Thus the unction of the evangelist became, in the hands of these wise and learned divines, an insinuated sacrament. This fact proved very plainly the confusion and perplexity in which the Council of Trent felt themselves to be involved, when they attempted to bring forward Scripture proof for the institution of this supposed sacrament.

But we have not yet done with the inconsistencies of Roman Catholic divines on this subject. Maldonatus, a Jesuit, and one of their most learned commentators on Scripture, in writing on the before-quoted passage of St. Mark, asks—"If the sacrament of extreme unction be not here, where is it?" This question is not asked without reason; and yet, according to the confession of some of the greatest divines of the Church of Rome, the unction in St. Mark was *not* sacramental, or for the healing of the mind, but for the health of the body only. This was the opinion of Cardinal Cajetan and Cardinal Bellarmine, who recites other great authorities on the same side.‡ And any unprejudiced person calmly reading over the words of the evangelist—"They anointed with oil many that were sick, and *healed them*"—would obviously come to the same conclusion. Why, then, was Maldonatus so very anxious to find the sacrament of extreme unction in this passage of St. Mark? He well knew that the divines of his church had generally denied the unction which the Apostles used in St. Mark to be a sacramental unction, and that they had laid the stress of their cause upon St. James; but he saw the obvious inconvenience of this course: for the same unction being plainly spoken of in both places (as we shall see presently), those writers who give up one passage in effect give up both, and thus leave their sacrament without any testimony of Scripture at all.

We now come to the well-known verse of St. James, which the Council of Trent declared to be the promulgation of the sacrament of extreme unction. It runs as follows (James v. 14, 15, Douay Version):—"Is any man sick among you? let him bring in the priests of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick man: and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him."

\* Can. et decr. Con. Trid. Sess. xiv., cap. 1.—"Instituta est autem sacra hæc unctio infirmorum tanquam verè et propriè sacramentum Novi Testamenti, a Christo Domino nostro instituta, anathema sit."

† Vide Father Paul Sarpi, lib. iv. § 25.

‡ Bellarm. de Extr. Unc. c. ii.—"Illa unctio, qua utebantur apostoli, referebatur solum aut præcipue ad curationem morbi corporalis; ut ex eo loco patet, unde etiam sanabantur omnes, qui tum inungebantur; sacramenta autem per se ad animam pertinent, ad corpus per accedens aut certe secundario."

\* Conc. Trid. Sess. 7, can. 1.—"Si quis dixerit, sacramenta novæ legis non esse omnia a Jesu Christo Domino nostro instituta, anathema sit."

† Abridgement of Christian Doctrine, pp. 88-89. Belfast, 1833.

‡ Dens Theol. tom. vii., pp. 2, 3.

[N.B.—The Greek word here translated priests is *πρεσβυτερος*, which properly signifies "elders."] The first thing to be determined in this passage is the true meaning to be attached to the words—"The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." If they stood alone, no person would hesitate to admit that they refer to a miraculous cure to be wrought upon the sick person spoken of in the previous verse. "The Lord," it is said, "shall raise him up." From what? Obviously from his bed of sickness. The word used by S. James (*ἐγερῆι*) is the same as that spoken by our Lord himself, when he effected the miraculous cure of the impotent man recorded in St. John's Gospel, ch. v. 8, and addressed him thus:—"Rise, take up thy bed and walk." So far, therefore, the object of the anointing spoken of by S. James is manifestly identical with that practised by the Apostles when they were first sent out by our Lord. S. Mark informs us, as we have already seen, that the Apostles "anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them." S. James (one of those same Apostles, be it remembered), in the passage just quoted, orders a sick man to send for the elders of the Church, who were to pray over him, and anoint him with oil: and he adds, that "the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." The object aimed at in both cases is clearly the same—namely, the recovery of the sick person, which was to be accomplished by the exertion of the miraculous powers then vouchsafed by the Lord to certain members of his Church, in accordance with his own parting words (S. Mark xvi. 17)—"These signs shall follow them that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." These miraculous gifts were not bestowed upon all Christians alike, nor could they be exerted upon all occasions. If an indiscriminate gift of healing all diseases were possessed by the Apostles and their cotemporaries, it is manifest that they might all have been alive to this day. There must have been some inward movement of the Spirit of God upon the mind, before any person could feel confident that a miracle could be wrought through his instrumentality; and this is the meaning of "the prayer of faith" spoken of by S. James, which one or more of the elders, moved by the Spirit of God, were to make for the recovery of the sick person, in full persuasion that the Lord, who gave the inward impulse to perform the miracle, would complete his own work, and restore the sick man to health.

The words of St. James, therefore, plainly refer to the miraculous cure of diseases, of which the anointing with oil was the outward sign. The same sign, as we have seen, was used by the Apostles generally for the same object; and even our Lord himself sometimes condescended to accompany a miraculous cure with some outward sign, as, for example, when he anointed the eyes of the blind man with clay—John xi. 6. But St. James goes on to add, "and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." Now, we frequently read in Scripture that bodily diseases were inflicted by God as a punishment for some sin. Thus, in the Old Testament, King Uzziah was stricken with leprosy for offering sacrifice in the sanctuary, and Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was smitten with the same disease for lying and covetousness. We read, too, in St. John's Gospel, that our Lord thus addressed the impotent man whom he had cured—"Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." And St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, who had profaned the sacrament of the Lord's Supper—"For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."—1 Cor. xi. 32. In cases such as these, therefore, when the sickness was inflicted as a bodily chastisement for sin, the healing of the disease was a testimony that God forgave the sin. Thus, for example, when our Lord cured the man sick of the palsy (Matthew ix. 2, 6, 7), he addressed him thus—"Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee;" and, in this case, it deserves to be especially noted, that the miracles were wrought as a proof that the sins of the sick man were forgiven.—See verses 5, 6.

We have entered at some length into an explanation of this passage of St. James, because, when rightly understood, it affords no countenance whatever to the pretended sacrament of extreme unction. The anointing prescribed by St. James was to be administered to persons who were not to die, but to be raised up from sickness; it was primarily intended for the miraculous cure of diseases, and, therefore, was to last only so long as the Lord vouchsafed the gift of miracles to his Church; and the recovery of the sick man was to be the sure and certain token of the forgiveness of his sins promised by the Apostle. But that the anointing recommended by St. James cannot be the same as the extreme unction of the Roman Catholic Church, is evident from the following considerations:—St. James directs that the sick person should be anointed in reference to his cure; but the priest anoints him while in the agonies of death, when there is no prospect of recovery, and never administers this unction while there appears any hope of life. The Apostle orders this anointing for the cure of the body; but the Church of Rome applies it principally for the cure of the soul, concerning which

St. James gives no directions: for what is said of the forgiveness of sins is to be referred to faith and prayer, and not to the anointing. The anointing which St. James recommends was only applied in some cases, perhaps very few; but the Church of Rome uses it in all cases: therefore, St. James's unction, and the extreme unction of the Church of Rome, are two very different things.

Again, when we come to examine the effects which the great Roman Catholic divines ascribe to extreme unction, we find ourselves involved in the utmost confusion and perplexity. "It remits mortal sins," says Dens.\* "It is not to be understood of mortal sins," says Faber.† "It remits venial sins," says the Catechism of the Council of Trent;‡ and it adds a reason, "for mortal sins are taken away by the sacrament of penance." "No," says Thomas Aquinas, "this is not true; it does not take away venial sins, but only the remains of sin."§ "Yes," says the Council of Trent, "it takes away both venial and mortal sins; for it wipes away all remains of sin."|| Thus nothing but perplexity seems to attend us in almost every step that we take in investigating the opinions of Roman Catholic divines regarding the effect of this rite. Where, we may well ask, is the great benefit Roman Catholics derive from their boasted possession of an infallible head, if it cannot enforce even the semblance of unity and consistency in the account which their divines give of what they refer to as one of the most important sacraments of their church?

We have seen that the words of the Apostle James related to the healing of the sick, or to their restoration to health, and that they furnish no authority for anointing the dying, solely with a view to their departure. There is reason to think that the practice of anointing the sick was superstitiously continued after the miraculous powers of healing had ceased; but of its being considered a sacrament, to be administered to the dying for their spiritual benefit, we read nothing for many centuries after Christ. There is no mention of it in Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Tertullian, or Cyprian, or in any of the writers of the first centuries, who wrote frequently and plainly of the discipline and sacraments of the Church. Four hundred revolving years ran their ample round, and left no trace of this sacrament. The ancient Fathers have treated freely of the two sacraments which have always been recognised in Christ's Church; baptism and the Lord's Supper meet the reader's eye in almost every page of their works. But extreme unction, wonderful to tell, is never mentioned. This ceremony which, in modern days, is said to remit sin, and strengthen the soul of the dying, and to be almost indispensable to salvation, is nowhere spoken of. This was a woeful and vexatious omission in the good Fathers, and has put modern Roman Catholic divines to a sad puzzle. Bellarmine and Archbishop M'Hale endeavour to excuse the ancients for omitting the history of this sacrament in their works, by alleging their want of occasion. The cardinal and archbishop for once are right. The early Christian authors had no opportunity for mentioning such a sacrament; for, in plain truth, such a sacrament did not then exist.

Pope Innocent the First, who flourished so late as the fifth century, is the earliest witness adduced on the Roman Catholic side of this question. Decentius, Bishop of Egrubium in Italy, had occasion to consult the pontiff on this subject, who returned the following answer:—"The diseased faithful may be anointed with consecrated oil of chrism. This ointment may be used, not only by priests, but by all Christians, who may anoint not only themselves, but also their friends. But the chrism may not be poured on penitents, for it is a kind of sacrament."¶

We request the reader's particular attention to this reply. Pope Innocent says that *not only priests, but all Christians may anoint themselves as well as their friends*. The Church of Rome now says, that extreme unction can only be administered by a priest, and anathematizes all who believe otherwise. Pope Innocent calls this rite "a kind of sacrament." The Council of Trent denounced a terrible anathema against any person who should presume to deny that extreme unction was a true and proper sacrament instituted by Christ. Surely, we have here abundant proof that the Roman Catholic Church now holds a doctrine altogether different from that which it held in the time of Pope Innocent the First, and that, therefore, it cannot be the immutable, infallible church which it professes to be.

There are various other interesting points on this subject, to which we cannot now advert, but to which, on some future occasion, we may, perhaps, invite the attention of our readers.

\* Peccata mortalia remittit.—Dens. 7, 18.

† Non intelligitur de peccato mortali.—Faber ii., 259.

‡ Peccata venialia remittit.—Cat. Trid. 195.

§ Aquinas iii. 565. Faber ii. 259.

¶ Cuius unctio delicta, si qua sint adhuc explande, ac peccati reliquias abstergit.—Conc. Trid. Sess. xiv., cap. 2.

¶ Innoc. Ep. i. n. 8.—"Sancto oleo chrismatis non solum sacerdotibus, sed omnibus uti Christianis licet, in sua aut suorum necessitate inungendo. Penitentibus autem istud infundere non potest, quia genus est sacramenti."

## TALK OF THE ROAD—No. VI.

So Pat and Jem went straight to Mr. Owens' house, and he brought them into his study.

"Well, boys," said Mr. Owens, "did you read anything of the books, and how do you like them?"

"We like them well, your reverence," said Jem, "for they teach us more about God than ever we knew before, and they teach things that ought to make us love him if we have any heart to him at all."

"And do you find much difference in the books?" said Mr. Owens, turning to Pat.

"Nothing to speak of, for so far, your reverence," said Pat; "there's words here and there not just the same; but for the meaning, there's no differ to signify, that I see yet."

"There are some differences, though," said Mr. Owens, "that will surprise you very much when you come to them, for some of them are just the very contrary of the difference you might expect to find in the two books. But I will tell you about that some other time, for I would rather hear you speak now, if you have anything to ask me about what you find in the books."

"That's just it, your reverence," said Jem; "we want to ask you about the right way of praying to God; for sure when we see what he says to them that pray to him, it's a poor thing not to know the right way."

"Well," said Mr. Owens, "it's a good thing when reading the Bible makes us ask questions like that; but if you could explain your difficulty a little more, I might know better how to help you."

"Well, your reverence," said Pat, "we want to know if the likes of us, poor creatures, may just go straight to God, and pray to him ourselves, without anybody to speak to him for us, or if we must get somebody to speak for us, and offer our prayers to him—somebody that he will be more willing to listen to than to ourselves."

"That's a very important question," said Mr. Owens, "and the answer 's very plain; we are sinful and fallen creatures, not fit in ourselves to speak to a God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; and, therefore, we have no reason to hope that our prayers will come up to him at all, unless somebody that a holy God can listen to should offer up our prayers to him, and intercede with him to accept our prayers."

"Why, your reverence," said Jem, "sure the Protestants don't believe that!"

"A man who does not believe that," said Mr. Owens, "cannot be a Christian, and so we need not talk about his being a Protestant. But we do believe it, and it lies at the root of our religion, and all our prayers to God are founded on it."

"And so," said Pat, "your reverence thinks it good to get the Blessed Virgin, and the angels, and the saints, to speak for us to God, and get him to hear our prayers?"

"No," said Mr. Owens, "I did not say that we were to get them to speak for us; we should be sure to get some one that we know can hear us, and that we know God will hear."

"And who will we get, your reverence," said Pat, "if we don't get them to speak for us?"

"Maybe your reverence means," said Jem, "the verse that we read here in the two books, the last night we were here."

"That's just what I mean," said Mr. Owens; "and now, do you remember what it was?"

"I do, your reverence," said Jem; "it was just this—'There is one God, and one mediator of God and man—the man Christ Jesus.'"

"Well," said Mr. Owens, "we think that if we go to God without that mediator, that we have no right to believe that God will accept our prayers; but if we have that mediator to intercede for us, and offer up our prayers to God, and ask him to receive them, then our prayers will be accepted by God; and before we go any farther," said Mr. Owens, "let me show you, out of the Douay Bible, why we think so."

So Mr. Owens turned to the following passages and read them—"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me."—John xiv. 6. "Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you."—John xvi. 23. "Jesus is entered into heaven itself, that he may appear now in the presence of God for us."—Hebrews ix. 24. "He is able also to save for ever them that come to God by him; always living to make intercession for us."—Heb. vii. 25. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."—Luke xxii. 32. "And not for them (the Apostles) only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me."—John xvii. 20. "So here you see," said Mr. Owens, "if we want to come to God in prayer, we must come through Christ, who is the way; and we must pray in the name of Christ if we want our prayers to be granted; and then Christ makes intercession for us, that our prayers may be heard, and he prays for all who believe in his Word. So you see," said Mr. Owens, "we do not want for somebody to pray for us, and to intercede with God to hear our prayers; we have one who is able and willing to do it; and if we want our prayers to be heard